

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (Currently amended) A method of populating **and using an electronic** account-owner verification database comprising:

(a) collecting participant data elements from one or more participant institutions, the participant data elements associated with one or more participant accounts in the participant institutions, and each participant data element also corresponding to a data element field in the database, wherein the participant institutions are entities capable of providing accurate financial account data on a regular basis;

(b) collecting non-participant data elements from one or more non-participant institutions, the non-participant data elements associated with one or more non-participant accounts in the non-participant institutions, and each non-participant data element also corresponding to one of the data element fields in the database, wherein the non-participant institutions are entities not obligated to provide account information on the regular basis, **and wherein the non-participant institutions comprise at least one of a check imaging device or database, check printers, electronic bill payment companies, Internet account opening systems and Internet banking systems; and**

(c) populating the data element fields of the **electronic account-owner** verification database with the collected participant and non-participant data elements;

**(d) entering into the electronic account-owner verification database, for an account to be verified:**

**(i) an account number; and**

**(ii) at least one data element corresponding to the entered account number;**

**(e) querying the account-owner verification database including data from both the participant institutions and the non-participant institutions;**

**(f) receiving a response from the account-owner verification database for each of the entered data elements, wherein the response corresponding to each entered data element is positive if the account data stored in the data element field corresponding to the entered account number matches the entered data element, respectively; and**

**(g) generating a report of the response.**

2. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of:

(d) automatically and periodically updating the data element fields in the database with participant data elements from recently opened or recently maintained accounts in the participant institutions.

3. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein step (c) further comprises organizing the participant and non-participant data elements according to account number.

4. (Original) The method of claim 3 wherein step (c) further comprises organizing the account numbers and their associated participant and non-participant data elements according to routing transit number.

5. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein step (b) further comprises extracting data elements from check images.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein step (b) further comprises extracting data elements from check printing data.

7. (Previously presented) An account-owner verification database comprising:

a plurality of data element fields populated with participant data elements and non-participant data elements, wherein

the participant data elements are collected from one or more participant institutions and the participant data elements are associated with one or more participant accounts in the participant institutions, wherein the participant institutions are entities capable of providing accurate financial account data on a regular basis; and

the non-participant data elements are collected from one or more non-participant institutions and the non-participant data elements are associated with one or more non-participant accounts in the non-participant institutions, wherein the non-participant institutions are entities not obligated to provide account information on the regular basis.

8. (Original) The account verification database of claim 7 wherein the data element fields are automatically and periodically updated with participant data elements from recently opened or recently maintained accounts in the participant institutions.

9. (Original) The account verification database of claim 7 wherein the participant and non-participant data elements are organized in the data element fields according to account number.

10. (Original) The account verification database of claim 9 wherein the account numbers and their associated participant and non-participant data elements are organized in the data element fields according to routing transit number.

11. (Original) The account verification database of claim 7 wherein the data elements are extracted from check images.

12. (Original) The account verification database of claim 7 wherein the data elements are extracted from check printing data.

13. (Currently amended) A method of verifying information associated with transacting on an account, the method comprising:

(a) providing an account verification database, the database including account data corresponding to a plurality of data element fields and organized according to account number, the account data being obtained from participant institutions and non-participant institutions, wherein:

the participant institutions are entities capable of providing accurate financial account data on a regular basis; and

the non-participant institutions are entities not obligated to provide account information on the regular basis;

(b) entering into the database, for an account to be verified:

(i) an account number; and

(ii) at least one data element corresponding to the entered account number;

(c) querying the account verification database including data from both the participant institutions and the non-participant institutions; and

(d) receiving a response from the database for each of the entered data elements, wherein the response corresponding to each entered data element is positive if the account data stored in the data element field corresponding to the entered account number matches the entered data element, respectively; and

(e) generating a report of the response.

14. (Original) The method of claim 13 further comprising the step of:

(e) receiving a negative response from the database corresponding to each entered data element if the account data stored in the data element field corresponding to the entered account number does not match the entered data element, respectively.

15. (Original) The method of claim 14 further comprising the step of:

(f) generating a report to the participant institution associated with the entered account number that the data element resulted in a negative response.

16. (Original) The method of claim 13 further comprising the step of:

(e) receiving a neutral response from the database corresponding to each entered data element if the data element field corresponding to the entered account number does not contain any account data for the entered data element, respectively.

17. (Original) The method of claim 13 wherein step (a) further comprises entering a routing transit number corresponding to the entered account number.